



**UNITED TRIBES
OF NORTH DAKOTA**

Sisseton-Wahpeton Oyaté | Spirit Lake Tribe
Standing Rock Sioux Tribe | Three Affiliated Tribes
Turtle Mountain Band of Chippewa Indians

September 8, 2017

Senator John Hoeven
338 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Senator Heidi Heitkamp
110 Hart Senate Office
Washington, DC 20510

Congressman Cramer
1717 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Senators and Congressman:

We address you with a heavy heart as we mourn the tragic loss of Savanna LaFontaine-Greywind. “Where Thunder Finds Her,” Savanna’s Dakota name, was a member of the Spirit Lake Nation, and also Turtle Mountain Band of Chippewa from her mother’s side. The United Tribes of North Dakota and our citizens stand in solidarity with Savanna’s family, and all the families of missing and murdered Native American women.

During the gatherings and prayers for Savanna, we heard story after story from families who also have women in their families missing or with unsolved murders. The murder of Savanna illustrates a much larger problem of epic proportions. In some locations, Native American women are murdered at more than ten times the national average, and one in three experience sexual violence.ⁱ Further, because law enforcement data related to murdered and missing Native women is often inconsistent and underreported, we believe these statistics are likely even higher on our reservations in North Dakota.

Greater awareness of this epidemic is important and we appreciate your support of S. Res 60, the “National Day of Awareness for Missing and Murdered Native Women and Girls.” However, action is what is needed. We urge you to consider the following recommendations:

- Create a federal-local law enforcement task force regarding Greywind’s murder to ensure justice, and to ensure appropriate crime victim resources are provided to her child and family;

- Direct the DOJ to commission a cross-jurisdictional law enforcement task force to re-open the cold files on the hundreds of missing and murdered Native American women. Direct this task force to also create national protocols on missing Native women, to coordinate the multiple jurisdictions;
- Require the DOJ to collect and provide statistics on an annual basis, and recommendations on data collection on missing and murdered Native American women, Native women are one of the only populations without this data;ⁱⁱ
- Support the Violence Against Women Act, and the continued strengthening of tribal criminal jurisdiction, so that the murder of a Native woman on an Indian reservation will finally receive the same swift justice and law enforcement resources as off reservation;
- Ensure all United States Attorneys for North Dakota fully appreciate their unique treaty obligations in Indian Country;
- End the unconscionable exclusion of tribal governments from the federal Crime Victims Fund so that we can provide victim services to our families with missing and murdered Native women;
- Guarantee that Tribal law enforcement agencies are given equal access to National Crime Information Center (“NCIC”) and the Tribal Access Program for National Crime Information (“TAP”);
- Provide tribal law enforcement and courts additional funding to develop protocols on missing persons; Ensure federal law enforcement receive appropriations to protect our women, consistent with their federal treaty obligation;
- Appreciate that mascots, utilization of racial slurs, and other caricaturizations of Native Americans contribute to the unconscious dehumanization and objectification of Native American women, which contributes to the ease in which violence is directed towards them;
- Commission a Congressional task force to undertake a study similar to one conducted in Canada, in partnership with tribes and Native women’s advocacy groups.ⁱⁱⁱ

Time is of the essence. We are outraged by this unspeakable act of violence against such a beautiful life and we know that our call for justice is one that is shared throughout North Dakota and beyond. Justice is needed for Savanna, and support for her child and family.

Our communities are mobilized and considering ways we can address this scourge locally. We hope that through this tragedy, we can work together to honor Savanna and her family by taking aim to end the national epidemic of excessive violence against Native American women.

We respectfully request the United States Congress take action. Let's not waste another moment – together we must act to end this national epidemic.

Sincerely,

Dave Flute
Chairman, Sisseton Wahpeton Tribe
Chairman, United Tribes of North Dakota

ⁱ National Institute of Justice: Violence Against American Indian and Alaska Native Women and Men , 2010. <https://www.ncjrs.gov/pdffiles1/nij/249736.pdf>

Perrelli, T. (July 14, 2011). Statement of Associate Attorney General Perrelli before the Committee on Indian Affairs on Violence Against Native American Women [citing a National Institute of Justice-funded analysis of death certificates]. Washington, DC. www.justice.gov/iso/opa/asg/speeches/2011/asg-speech-110714.html.

ⁱⁱ <https://archives.fbi.gov/archives/about-us/cjis/ncic/ncic-missing-person-and-unidentified-person-statistics-for-2013>

ⁱⁱⁱ National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls. <https://www.aadnc-aandc.gc.ca/eng/1448633299414/1448633350146>